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ABSTRACT

In order to determine the client's perspective of instructional development (ID) services, the perceptions of college professor clients of a campus-wide university ID center were studied, using a naturalistic inquiry interview approach based on the philosophy of symbolic interactionism. Developers' views were also examined through analysis of publications by and about the agency and examination of some personal documents. Initial data examination showed that the instructors' emotional responses were more relevant to understanding their perceptions than their manner of describing development activities. Recurring reactions of either indifference or irritation led to development of a typology of instructors, with categories labelled "believers," "skeptics," and "dropouts". Preconceived expectations were found to be the major difference between those completing and those not completing projects. Personal involvement and growth were the main factors differentiating believers from skeptics. Teacher thinking varied from developer's thinking. Fewer than half of the professors were "believers," indicating that ID may be unable to realistically meet all clients' needs, although belief was not necessary for project effectiveness. Individual differences may exist in need for either consulting or counseling. Twelve references are listed. (LMM)

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BELIEVERS, SKEPTICS AND DROPOUTS:

Faculty Thinking About Instructional Development

by

Constance A. Mellon

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BELIEVERS, SKEPTICS AND DROPOUTS
Faculty Thinking About Instructional Development

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In higher education, instructional development is most frequently defined as a service activity in which a faculty member and an instructional developer work in close cooperation to redesign an existing course or to design a new one. This activity is considered by those in the field as a method of bringing "order to chaos." In fact, the zeal which many practioners bring to development can be likened to the Biblical origins of this phrase. In the definition of these practioners, "order" (or the good) is represented by the instructional development process and chaos (or the bad) is represented by the way in which teachers approach the design of instruction. This view is clearly reflected in descriptions of instructional development which appear in the literature of the field. These descriptions fall into four categories: models, competencies, reports and heuristics.

Models and competencies represent the ideal. Models (Stamos, 1971; Twelker, Urbach & Buck, 1972) distill from the development process the basic steps ideally followed and present them in a rational outline while competencies (Audiovisual Instruction, 1974) describe in extensive detail what an instructional developer should be able to do. Reports (Diamond, Eickmann, Kelly, Holloway, Taylor & Wilson, 1973; Educational Development Program, M.S.U., 1977) and heuristics (Haney, Lange & Barson, 1968; Holsclaw, 1974) specify the techniques which developers perceive as effective approaches to instructional development. Each of these ways of describing instructional development shares a common perspective; that of the instructional developer. Because this is so, the systematic way of designing instruction is pictured as always beneficial, always the best possible way to design a learning experience. This picture, however, is incomplete. There is a missing perspective, one which can add a dimension of reality to this prescribed panacea for all instructional ills. The perspective needed to complete the picture is that of the client of instructional development services, the university professor.

Background of the Study

Employing the techniques of naturalistic inquiry, an indepth study was conducted at a major Eastern university to determine how professors thought about the instructional development process in which they had participated. All professors were, or had been, the clients of a campus-wide instructional development center. The approach used in this study was based on the philosophy of such social scientists as C.H. Cooley (1902), G.H. Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1966). This philosophy, known as symbolic interactionism, differs from more conventional psychological and sociological framewarks in that the human being is viewed as an acting rather than a responding organism. The assumption is that people act on the basis of the meaning things have for them and that in order to understand the actions of people, it is necessary to interpret things as they do.

Basic to symbolic interactionism theory is an understanding of human behavior from the actor's own frame of reference. Blumer (1969) describes how this philosophy affects the selection of research methods:

> The contention that people act on the basis of the meaning of their objects has profound methodological implications. It signifies immediately that if the scholar wishes to understand the actions of people, it is necessary for him to see their objects as they see them. ... To identify the objects of central concern, one must have a body of relevant observations. These observations ... are in the form of descriptive accounts from the actors of how they see the objects, how they have acted toward the objects in a variety of different situations, and how they refer to the objects in their conversations with members of their own group. (pp. 50-52)

In order to procure the instructors' perceptions of instructional development, two sources of data were used. publications and interviews. To provide background, publications by and about the agency being studied which referred to development activities were read: In addition, some personal documents, including internal working papers and transcripts and summaries of presentations, were examined.

Interview was selected as the primary method for this study based on four criteria developed by Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein (1965). These are: relevance, accuracy, accessibility, and the economy of resources. The use of unstructured, or open-ended, interview appeared to be the most effective and efficient method in relation to these four criteria since, through the use of unstructured interview, a fairly clear picture of a respondent's private

definitions of a situation can be obtained (McCall & Simmons, 1969). University professors who had worked with the campus instructional development center formed the main category of interviewees for this study. This group included those new to teaching as well as those with many years of experience and with positions ranging from teaching assistant to full, tenured professor.

The constant comparative method of data collection and analysis was used to examine interview data. This method is described by Glaser and Strauss(1967) as:

> ... the process of data collection for tenerating theory whereby the analyst jointly collect, codes and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (p. 45)

As interviews were transcribed, they were reviewed to suggest new categories for exploration and specific types of subjects for interview. For example, it was noticed that personal themes were heavily emphasized by some respondents and not mentioned by others. Questions concerning personal themes could then be inserted at the end of interviews, thus contributing to a clearer understanding of a major distinction between two categories of instructors. Thirty-one interviews, varying in length from forty-five minutes to two hours and yielding over 900 pages of transcribed notes, were conducted before the data were considered sufficiently redundant to cease collection.

Development of a Typology

The original intent of this study was to provide a narrative reflecting instructors' percpetions of their work with a campus instructional development agency; however, as the data was examined, it became apparent that the emotional responses of instructors to the instructional development situation was more relevant to understanding their perceptions then the way in which they described development activities. Respondents had mastered instructional development jargon and described the same activities, often in the same terms, yet their descriptions varied depending on how they felt about the development experience as a whole. For example, when discussing the issue of implementation of instructional designs, some instructors were very enthusiastic about the support they had received from the Center:

> Their objectives are really more toward making sure this thing actually happen.

Their attitudes differed sharply from those of other instructors who felt that no effort had been made to meet their need:

> If you're discouraged at the implementation level, then you're discouraged period.

Perhaps the strongest contrast was presented by statements from two instructors, both of whom were discussing their perceptions of the Center as a whole. The first was highly supportive:

> I think the Center works because of the people they have in it. The ideas and the Center's task and role are sound. But there is only one thing that separates the Center from absolute tragedy --- the quality of the people they've got in it right now.

The second was intensely critical:

> The whole center operation is a bust!

These contrasting statements reflect a second perspective of development, an emotional level not found in the existing literature. Published accounts of instructional development activities have focused on the business level of people doing development activities. The emotional level, however, added a new perspective. It provided a picture of how people felt about the activities in which they were engaged and this picture was, in some areas, sharply different from that presented in the literature. While all the developers writing about the development process were enthusiastic, not all instructors felt this way. Some expressed indifference and others were actively irritated. These reactions, which occurred over and over in the data, led to the development of a typology of instructors, the three main categories of which were labelled Believers, Skeptics, and Dropouts. The names arose from actual statements of those interviewed:

> They brought us through their process and now we are believers and converters.

> When I look back on the process, I'm skeptical of it. I'm not sure it was that much concrete help.

> We kept trying until we felt they had lost interest and then we just dropped out.

With the recognition of this typology of instructors as basic to data analysis in the study, two questions arose. How did those who completed the study differ from those who dropped out? How did those who believed in the value of development activities differ from those who doubted its value?

Comparison Between Dropouts and Completers

Starting with a group of university instructors, all of whom were exposed to somewhat the same initial introduction to instructional development, some completed the process while others dropped out. Dropouts appeared to be of two kinds, Early and Late. (See Figure 1 below.) Early dropouts appeared to perceive the activities of the Center as incompatible with their own values and refused to engage in any development activities. Late Dropouts engaged in development activities but, when preconceived expectations were not met, they stopped participation before their project was finished.

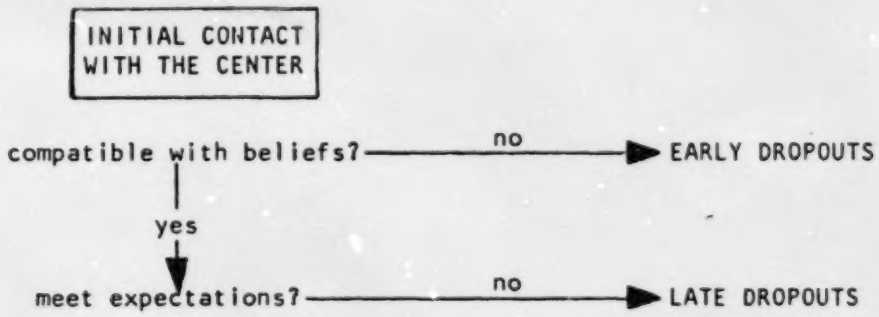

Figure 1

Preconceived expectations appeared to be the major difference between those who finished projects and those who did not finish them. Whereas all Late Dropouts described very specific expectations in terms of products, most Skeptics and Believers explained that they had no definite ideas of what the instructional development experience would be like. As one of the Believers explained,

> I would doubt very, very seriously if a person with strong expectations would get a great deal out of the Center --- if, for example, he went in and said, 'Well, what I need is some audio-visual assistance.'

This view was supported by the interview data of those in the Dropout category, one of whom declared,

> They gave me a little stimulation and a little support --- but not the kind of support I was expecting which was materials development. I never got that support.

Shared Perceptions of Skeptics and Believers

Two groups completed projects: Skeptics and Believers (See Figure 2). Before examining the difference between these two groups, it might be helpful to mention four parts of the instructional development process which both Skeptics and Believers described as useful: "thinking through the course"; focusing on student needs; training for effective instruction; and facilitating implementation.

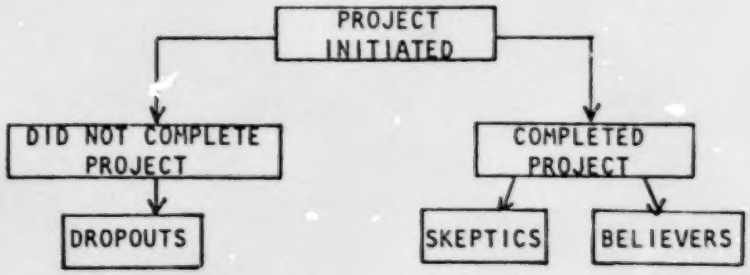

Figure 2

Both Skeptics and Believers described a process which they called "thinking through the course." This process consisted of two parts, questioning and suggesting. One respondent described it this way:

> I recall his trying to analyze what we were doing and his feeding me all kinds of questions, making a number of suggestions with no value attached to which one I might choose. And once I'd make my choice, we'd discuss what that might or might not do.

The process was described by both groups as helpful in clarifying what content was important to teach and what methods might best be used to teach it.

Skeptics and Believers both pointed out the importance of the Center's role in facilitating the implementation of the course they had designed. As one respondent termed it, "someone to support the nitty gritty logistical operation when it comes to putting these things into practice." A second respondent claimed that the instructional development process was "not just philosophical, but very tangible." He added,

> But they can deal with tangibles. They can do the printing. They can do the artwork. They can do the layout. They can do the typing. They can do

> all these things better than anybody else. It's absolutely amazing the reputation that the Center has.

Two outcomes of completing the instructional development activities were described by both Skeptics and Believers. These are an increased student focus and a greater effectiveness in the design of instruction. Both groups mentioned an increased awareness of the student for whom instruction was intended. Prior to instructional development, they claimed, they had never really focused on the needs of their students.

A department chairman told me, "Our people would way, 'This is what we want the kids to do,' rather than asking the question, 'If I were the student, how would I like to see it done'?" Another professor described his experience this way,

> In terms of articulating my content, I was now doing it in a way that I had never done it before. I was not longer doing it for the other two colleagues in my department. Instead, I was making an overt effort to address myself to my students, the profile of which I hadn't really been very self-conscious about prior to coming in contact with the Center.

Both groups described their contact with the Center as being a learning experience. "I think what they do more than anything else is educate you," said one.

"It was a very specific kind of education," said another. It was sort of on-the-job training."

The result of this experience was described primarily in terms of a clearer way of thinking about instruction. And this was described as being carried over into the design of future courses:

> I think it's just an attitude more than anything else. I have a cast of mind now, a part of my muscle fiber, to think in terms of the design of learning experiences. I'm clearer about stating the intent of each thing that I do in terms of thinking through the flow of things. And I'm constantly looking for new ways that would be better to present material. I think quite differently now. And it's a very interesting intellectual process.

The outcome of the instructional development activity, the newly designed course, was discussed with equal satisfaction by both Skeptics and Believers and the courses, when evaluated showed little difference

between the two groups on the basis of student satisfaction and student achievement. Indeed, one of the most successful courses by all evaluation measures had been designed by a Skeptic. Thus it was apparent that both Skeptics and Believers shared a number of benefits as a result of their development activities. These benefits, however, appeared to be in the area discussed earlier as the "business level" of development while the factors separating the two groups were clearly on the emotional level.

Differences Between Skeptics and Believers

The major theme separating Believers from Skeptics was personal involvement. This theme, while recurring throughout the interview data of all faculty in the Believer category, was noticeably absent in conversations with Skeptics. (See Figure 3.) Two other themes, need for developer and impact on content, created additional clear contrasts between these two groups.

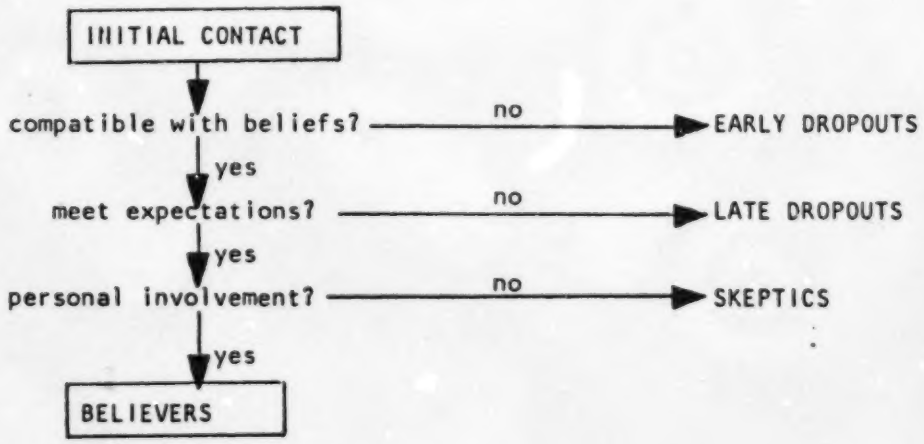

Figure 3

Believers all expressed some kind of strong personal involvement, an experience of self-discovery, change, and growth as a result of their relationship with the instructional developer. They described development as fun and discussed a synergy, or kind of excitement, that grew between themselves and their developers as the projects progressed.

One Believer expressed his feeling of growth this way:

> It's a rather interesting approach that the Center uses in faculty growth. And I'm using only my own experience because I know that I have matured and grown extensively as a faculty member in terms of various areas of instructional development and of my own field and so forth.. But I have never felt any push or anything of a pressure type situation. It has just happened. Yet underneath I know that the Center is there giving all kinds of support to that type of program.

A second Believer described the personal involvement she experienced in terms of counseling, the field in which she was trained:

> I think the major advantage I got out of working with the Center had nothing to do with the course. It had to do with me and my potential and my capabilities and my feelings about myself. My developer, in a lot of ways, did what I do in counseling --- letting me vent, letting me talk about what was going on in me, talking to some extent about what was going on in him that was similar. Just making me feel that there was a lot more available to me than in the past. I don't think that makes him any less of a developer. I think that makes him more of one. I really think that's their strength --- not developing and redesigning courses, but developing and redesigning people.

While all Believers who were interviewed mentioned this theme of personal involvement with their developer and the personal growth experiences that occurred as a result, none of those who expressed skepticism about development mentioned a personal relationship or personal changes.

In the area of need for a developer, the groups were clearly divided. Believers expressed their need for developers and explained that they could not have done the work on their own. "If it had been left to me," claimed one Believer, "I would never have done it --- never. That's a personality thing, no reflection on the process or the outcome. It's just what I know I cannot do."

In contrast, Skeptics said that they would have done the work anyway, that they did not really need the help of a developer. Whereas Believers discussed a continuing need for development help from the Center, Skeptics were not interested in using the services of the Center again. "Would you go back?" I asked one Skeptic.

"I don't know as I have the energy," was his response. "It took a lot out of me. And the rewards are not all that clear."

An interesting outcome of engaging in instructional development was the difference between the way Skeptics and Believers talked about content. The content of a course was, quite naturally, a major concern of faculty. An important part of academic freedom is the right to control one's own course content, to make decisions on what to include and what to omit, what to emphasize and what to change. Faculty have sued to maintain this right and have resigned when this right was denied. The preoccupation with content was reflected by Skeptics and Believers alike.

Both groups strongly expressed their feelings of ownership toward course content and explained that in their work with the Center, this content ownership was consistently respected. "My content," it was emphasized, "was not impinged upon at any point."

The contrast came in discussing the impact of instructional development activities on content. Skeptics described this impact totally in terms of form of presentation, mentioning a feeling of pressure toward how to present.

> The way the Center came on from the very first meeting was that here's the techniques we'd like you to use. I mean they said I could do it any way I wanted, but I could tell that they wanted me to do it their way.

Although Skeptics said there was pressure to present or to package their courses in some particular way, they claimed that the content did not change. In fact, one Skeptic described instructional development as a "process for structuring."

"You don't perceive that the interaction between you and the developer has made any impact on the actual thing that you teach?" one faculty member later designated as a Skeptic was asked. He replied,

> Oh no, not at all. My developer has always been willing for me to make the decisions about what's in the course. The Center made that very clear at the outset. We are not trying to tell you what to put in your course, but we'd like to have you package it a certain way.

Skeptics felt that change in form was unrelated to change in content, but Believers saw a definite connection between the two. As one Believer expressed it, "The form of teaching pedagogy is, in a sense, part of the subject matter. You can't separate content from form."

While Believers said that their participation in the instructional development process "had a definite impact on content," they did not seem to feel that this violated their right of content ownership. Nor did they mention any feelings of pressure toward specific techniques such as that described by the Skeptics. Instead, they expressed satisfaction with the relationship between form and content and with the impact of their relationship with the developer upon their content.

> This process involves a thorough study of the domain. I think when that happens, it opens your eyes to many areas you had not thought about. I know that happened in my case. I started to realize that there were some areas I just did not know about until I started looking into this and examining that and taking a survey of this topic and so on. The second part of the process allows us to work in the sky as if there were no constraints. And I think when a person does that you come up with a very creative, imaginative program. So I would say that these two aspects of process had a profound impact on content.

Personal involvement and personal growth, then were the main factors differentiating Believers from Skeptics. Need for a developer and content impact were discussed by both groups, but from varying perspectives depending on how strongly they believed in the value of the instructional development process.

Implications of the Study

This study has proposed a typology of instructor reactions to instructional development. It has shown how faculty, confronted with the message and activities of systematic instructional development reject, accept with reservation, or come to believe wholeheartedly in the efficacy of the process. It has differentiated between the business level of instructional development reflected in the literature and the emotional level of instructional development which colors faculty perceptions of the business level. Two points arising from the information presented in this article merit discussion: the discrepancy between the picture of instructional development reported in the literature and that arising from the emotional reactions of faculty and the similarity of benefits from the instructional development process reported by Believers and Skeptics.

As has been mentioned earlier in this article, instructional development literature describes development from the perspective of the developer.

Since developers would not be involved in this activity if they were not convinced it was absolutely the best way to design instruction, the literature of the field reflects this view of the efficacy of the process. This study, on the other hand, shows that teacher thinking varied from the thinking of developers. Not all professors who engaged in instructional development activities were enthusiastic about its continued use. As one professor, a Skeptic, claimed,

> I think there's a hard sell, or a soft sell, or whatever you want to call it. Well, I'm not sure any of this is conscious. But it's the enthusiasm of the instructional technologist who obviously, professio..al and vocationally, is sold on what he is doing, sharing this enthusiasm --- and is it catching! But I think it is so ambiguous whether what I am doing now is any better than what I did before --- it's different, to be sure --- but whether it is, in fact, better is debatable.

While this was not a statistical study, it should be mentioned that less than half of the professors who were interviewed were Believers in the process. This indicates that, while instructional development met the needs of some professors extremely well, it was unreasonable to expect that it would meet the needs of everyone. This point needs to be clearly understood by all those involved in instructional development: developers, professors, and perhaps most importantly, administrators responsible for the funding of such programs.

A second point that needs to be considered is the similarity of benefits derived by Skeptics and Believers from their participation in the instructional development process. This study showed that faculty who were Believers were indistinguishable from Skeptics in their descriptions of instructional development. The descriptions were similar in terms of activities and, in most instances, in terms of the effectiveness of the outcomes. While Skeptics expressed some feelings of doubt about the outcomes of development, they generally described the courses they developed as successful. However, when they discussed how they felt about the development process, the difference was clear. Some faculty expressed skepticism while others had become intensely involved and committed.

An interesting implication of these findings is that belief is not necessary for project effectiveness. The faculty member who served as

content person for one of the most visibly successful projects of the Center was a Skeptic. Belief, therefore, does not appear to be related to project effectiveness. Project effectiveness was defined by the Center in terms of faculty and student satisfaction with the course and, in comparison with the old course, increased enrollment and equal or better student achievement. All of these elements were, to some extent, observed in the projects of faculty who were Skeptics as well as faculty who were Believers.

Furthermore, the instructional development process as an inservice education activity, was equally effective for both Skeptics and Believers. This educational aspect of engaging in instructional development is another of the claims of its benefits made by proponents. Skeptics as well as Believers described an increased awareness of the student and a clearer way of thinking about instruction. These development activities, when viewed as inservice education, do not depend upon the instructor's belief in the need to work through the process with a Center developer nor in their desire to engage in further activities with the Center. Thus effectiveness of this aspect of instructional development does not depend upon generating belief in the faculty/client.

If belief is not necessarily a component of project effectiveness, and if personal involvement is the major factor separating belief from skepticism, then a difference between the needs of Skeptics and those of Believers emerges. This difference might be seen as educational consulting as opposed to educational counseling. Some faculty may need only a brief exposure to facts while others may require a more in-depth experience. Thus the project producing a Skeptic who feels that what has been produced and/or what has been learned is of value and the project producing a Believer could be viewed as equally effective.

Teacher thinking about the values of, and uses for, instructional development as depicted in this study argue strongly for the need to treat faculty as individuals in our approach to their instructional problems. For example, the Late Dropout category of this study showed that faculty who do not complete projects are not necessarily opposed to the idea of instructional development. The Late Dropout group had specific product expectations that were not met and, when interviewed, they still wanted these products and were frustrated because they could not have them. This argues strongly for the existence and support of a product-oriented division within a more

process-oriented center. Had product-oriented development been a recognized and accepted part of the instructional development activities of the Center in this study, perhaps those faculty with strong product expectations would not have become Dropouts. And, as was pointed out earlier, some faculty may need long-term involvement incorporating aspects of personal counseling while others may require only a single experience in course redesign as in-service training in the systematic approach to the development of instruction.

By a study of clients' perceptions of instructional development, it becomes clear that professors are individuals, each approaching the design of instruction in the way most comfortable to him or her. Instructional developers who, in their work with university faculty, emphasize so strongly the individual learning styles of students must respect the individual teaching styles of faculty. This includes their approach to the design of instruction. Instructional development models, it must be remembered, are idealized versions of how the process should proceed. While these models usually incorporate the development philosophy of the center which uses them, they rarely consider the individual differences among the instructor/clients to whom they are applied. Examining these differences through a study of teacher thinking about instructional development may add a more realistic dimension to the development philosophy of institutions with instructional development services and a broader and more useable definition of a successful development project.

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